

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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PAIR OF RUDDY DUCKS ON THE WATER WINS FIRST PLACE IN 1981-82 "DUCK STAMP" CONTEST

South Dakota artist John S. Wilson's tempera painting of male and female ruddy ducks sitting on the water won the 1981-82 Federal "Duck Stamp" competition on November 6 at the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C.

Wilson's entry topped a record 1,507 paintings in the Federal Government's only regularly sponsored art contest. The 51-year-old sign painter and designer from Watertown, South Dakota, joins the prestigious circle of "Duck Stamp" winners in the art world.

The design will be reproduced on next year's Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp which must be purchased by waterfowl hunters 16 years of age or older. Many stamps are also bought by other conservationists interested in habitat preservation and by a growing number of stamp collectors. Revenues from sales of this stamp, popularly called the "Duck Stamp," are used to buy additional wetlands and waterfowl habitat under a program administered by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Wilson, a self-taught artist, has worked for the Stein Sign Display company in Watertown for 25 years as a designer of plastic and neon signs. "I'm in a daze," he said when telephoned at his job and informed of his first-place win. "I'm just shaking like a leaf! I imagine the 'Duck Stamp' is going to mean a big change in my life."

The first South Dakotan to win the contest, Wilson had competed unsuccessfully in the last two Federal "Duck Stamp" showings with his designs of bufflehead ducks and blue geese. He chose to depict the drake and hen ruddies on a pool of still water "simply because it was a species that hadn't been on the stamp in a long time and I felt that there wouldn't be too many others to compete against. I strive for accuracy and for something that I think people will like."

The ruddy is a small species of duck, averaging 15 inches long and little more than a pound in weight. The ruddy duck often dives or swims away from danger rather than flying; when flying, its small wings beat so fast they resemble those of a bumblebee.

To produce his entry, the artist used a medium called "gouache," a premixture of opaque colors ground in water.

Wilson was the winner of the 1979 and 1981 South Dakota pheasant restoration stamp design contests. He also placed second and fourth in two recent State "Duck Stamp" contests.

A fisherman and hunter of ducks, geese, and pheasants since his childhood, Wilson first became interested in wildlife art in the past 5 years, when the State contests attracted his attention. After graduating from high school in Sisseton,

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South Dakota, he spent 8 years in the U.S. Air Force. He went on to complete a year of training in architectural drafting before becoming a sign painter, first in Aberdeen and later in Watertown.

Daniel S. Smith of Minneapolis, Minnesota, won second place this year, with his painting of lesser snow and blue geese, and Ann D. Dohoney, of Shawnee, Kansas, took third place with her depiction of a redhead duck.

Judges for this year's contest were Dr. Frank Bellrose, wildlife specialist with the Illinois Natural History Survey, of Havana, Illinois; Charles Cadieux, past president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America, Inc., of Albuquerque, New Mexico; Billy Joe Cross, regional supervisor for Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and a former member of the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission, of Clinton, Mississippi; Cindy Dixon Connor, editor of Waterfowler's World, of Memphis, Tennessee; and Hugh Galbreath, wildlife manager of the Remington Farms Game Management Area in Chestertown, Maryland. Leonard Buckley of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing served as technical advisor.

Prior to 1949, wildlife artists were commissioned to provide a design for the annual stamp. Since that time, the design has been chosen by a contest open to all artists who are residents or citizens of the United States. Contestants are allowed only one entry apiece.

The winner's financial reward is significant. The Federal Government offers no prize to the winner other than a sheet of the following year's "Duck Stamps," but commercial wildlife art dealers in the past have been eager to market limited edition reprints of the design. The contest has also served to uncover the talent of previously unknown wildlife artists.

The colorful stamps constitute the longest running, annually issued series of stamps in U.S. revenue or postage stamp history.

Since 1934, when "Duck Stamps" first went on sale, nearly 2.5 million acres of prime waterfowl habitat have been acquired with over \$367 million in revenue (\$225 million from "Duck Stamp" receipts and \$142 million from accelerated wetlands acquisition loan funds). By purchasing the stamps, more than 2.2 million conservationists provide over \$16.5 million in revenue yearly.

The Interior Department encourages non-hunters who also enjoy wildlife through photography, birdwatching, and other activities to contribute to the United States conservation effort by buying a "Duck Stamp." Next year's \$7.50 issue will go on sale at post offices on July 1, 1981.

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EDITORS: Black-and-white glossies are available by calling 202/343-8770.

